

## East Coventry Township History

From the East Coventry Township Comprehensive Plan, Adopted May 2003

At the beginning of the 18th century, the region was vaguely described in old records as “the Highest District from Skoolkill to Brandiwine,” and was known as the “Skoolkill District.” The name Coventry was given to it by Samuel Nutt, an early settler, whose forebears were from the English town of the same name. It was first settled in 1718 by twenty-eight families and there were four non-resident landowners. One of these landowners was Owen Roberts. By 1774, the population had almost tripled. That same year, Coventry had 78 landowners, among who were some whose names still exist on Township roads. Farming was then the chief pursuit, although several grist mills were located along Pigeon Creek.

Coventry Township was instrumental during the Revolutionary War. An 1879 newspaper clipping relates that “. . . on Herman Prizer’s farm on Ellis Woods Road stood a barn used as a hospital for American forces in the Revolutionary War . . . About 150 yards northwest of the barn, in a small copse of woods belonging to John Ellis are the graves of 16 American soldiers. The mounds over the graves are still visible, being side by side, in a straight line, and about four feet apart. There are no head or foot stones . . .” Following the Revolutionary War, there was a steady increase in population, and by 1840, the year before the Township was split in half to form North and South Coventry, the number of residents had climbed to 2620. In 1844, there was a further division, with East Coventry being carved out of North Coventry. The population in East Coventry Township in 1850 was recorded as 1228.

The water power of the Township provided industrial opportunities for early settlers. There were several mills in operation in the early to mid 1800’s. In addition, the early settlers found opportunities in agriculture. The land area adjacent to the Schuylkill River and Pigeon Creek provided exceptionally productive land for farming. It should be noted that a vast portion of these areas of the Township are still utilized for agricultural purposes.

The Schuylkill Canal Navigation System, located along or adjacent to the Schuylkill River in the northern portion of East Coventry Township, was incorporated in 1815 and completed in 1824. The purpose of the Schuylkill Canal was to provide a system for transporting coal, iron, lumber, merchandise and produce between Mt. Carbon / Mill Creek (Schuylkill County) and the City of Philadelphia. The total length of the system was 108 miles. Since the Township was located along this particular canal system, it provided several opportunities to the residents of the Township during this time. The system also played an important role in the growth and development of East Coventry Township.

By 1870, the Schuylkill Canal became obsolete and eventually was abandoned in favor of other improved transportation systems. Between 1850 and 1950, there was little change or growth within the Township. In appearance, it was still a rural community with agriculture as the dominant land use. During the 100 year time period, the population of East Coventry Township increased by only 271 residents. The population of the Township in 1950 was recorded as 1499. Between 1950 and 1960, the population increased to 2183 residents. This growth rate (45.5 percent) is mostly attributed to the availability of reasonably priced land, regional locality, a

growing economy, and the improvements to the regional transportation network. As of the 2000 Census, the Township population was 4566, representing slightly more than a doubling in population over the most recent 40 years. Much of the recent growth has occurred in the northern areas of the Township, in the form of residential housing built on productive farmland.

East Coventry Township has maintained a great deal of its historical character over the time of its existence. That character has been primarily agricultural. However, like most areas in the region, low density residential development is occurring as families find the area a pleasant place to live and access to employment centers improves. The region offers numerous opportunities for its residents, including good schools, recreational lands, local services and regional retail centers. Within this network of facilities and services, the setting of the Township remains one of low density development with a high degree of open space.